

# OUR SHORT STORY PAGE

## The Courtship of Miles Sheehan

By Porter Emerson Browne

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**P**OLICE Captain Sheehan tossed to the desk before him the little, gilt-edged copy of "The Courtship of Miles Standish" that, with the aid of his forefinger and much profanity, he had been laboriously perusing, and, cocking his feet up beside it, puffed on his cigar thoughtfully.

"Now there's a guy wit' th' right idea," he commented, "but he's a poor performer. He ain't got no noive, tuh be sure; but he ain't got no 'bilty, neither."

"He sets in his office wit' a good segar in his face an' he frames it up. 'Now if youse goes chasin' down tuh propose tuh the dame yuhself,' he says tuh himself, 'yuh'll get yuh woids all tangled up an' crab th' whole deal. When it comes tuh handin' out th' mush, Bill, yuh're a dead one. Yuh're done before yuh begin'."

"Now, he sees that that's straight talk he's givin' himself. He knows that when it comes tuh talkin', he's so bum that alongside o' him a deaf mute looks like Boike Cockran. He's like a guy wit' creepin' paralysis to a dance. He couldn't pull off this love play by himself an' he knows it; an' so fur he's got all four wheels on th' ashfelt an' is goin' fine."

"But there is where he makes his bad break by callin' in this Alden guy tuh he's him out. Now, what he should 'a' did was tuh get some hungry-lookin' mutt wit' a face like a fried aig an' send him down. But stead o' dat, he picks out a big, fine-lookin' lad. An' o' course de goil done what she done. Why wou'n' she? She flags this Standish guy an' nails th' other bloke, an' th' Standish guy gets what's comin' tuh him an' what he dissoives fr sein' such a dub. Now, if it had 'a' be'n me—"

He stopped short. His jaw dropped; and his cigar fell from his lips, unnoticed, to the floor.

"Gee!" he cried huskily. And again, "Gee!"

For some moments he sat there, immersed head-over in his own thoughts. At length, after a man might slowly have counted a hundred, he abstractedly drew another cigar, long and black, from his waistcoat-pocket and, biting off the end, fell to chewing it.

"Great!" he exclaimed at length. "Immense! I'll do it! I be dam' if I don't!"

### II

With a muttered anathema, Detective John Dugan laid down a hand that had in it four, and possibly five, kings, and prepared to obey the summons of his superior.

As he entered the door the captain looked up, nodded curtly and then plunged at once into the matter nearest his heart.

"Dugan," he said, "jever read this?" and he held up before the amazed eyes of the summonee the little gilt-edged volume.

Dugan took it. He looked at it. "Nope," he said, and handed it back.

"Y'oughter," advised the captain. "'S great stuff. Them lit'rary books improves yuh mind a lot. Course they don' hand yuh not'n yuh can use 'r not'n that'll do yuh no good, but they coit'nly does give a peach of a tone to a guy's conversation."

Dugan unenthusiastically aimed his crossed eyes at two opposite corners of the ceiling and thought of the four, and possibly five, kings.

"This book," continued the captain, "is 'bout a guy what is soft on a dame. He don't quite like tuh go makin' th' love play by his lonesome, so he sends a guy what works fr him down instead tuh hand out them sof' woids o' tenderness. . . . 'N' that 's 'bout enough o' th' book fr youse tuh know."

He ceased speaking and gazed at Detective Dugan thoughtfully.

"Well?" said the latter, impatiently stroking a square, heavy chin with a hand that closely resembled a badly cured ham. "Well, what of it? Huh?"

The captain twisted in his chair a trifle uneasily. "Jever see that goil o' Wolf Tone Brady's?"

Dugan considered. "Yuh mean th' peach?" he queried at length. "Th' strawberry blon' one wit' th' dark lamps?"

The captain nodded.

"That's th' one," he said. And then, after a long interval, "I'm kin' o' soft on that dame," and he twisted his moustache coquettishly.

Dugan, with stumpy fingers, caressed a nose that lay conspicuously on the bias and grunted noncommittally.

"She's all to th' good," he observed unenthusiastically, "an' there wit' th' looks. Swell enough tuh be a show-goil 'r a cloak model at least. Where yuh meet her?"

The captain took a deeper grip on his cigar. "I ain't never met her," he returned; "that is, not yet. I've jes' saw her couple o' times. I wan' youse tuh see her. See?" And he tapped significantly with a heavy forefinger the little gilt-edged volume.

Dugan saw.

"Oh!" he said understandingly. "So that's th' game, eh? Yuh wan' me tuh beat it down tuh th' dame's house an' frame it up fr youse, eh—sort o'

work up a entrance so's youse won' have nut'n tuh do but pile in an' nail it? Yuh wan' me tuh go down an' cook a dinner fr youse tuh eat?" He shook his head. "Say," he said, "I ain't no matrimonial agency. I'm a detective. Yuh wan' tuh see one o' them marriage broker guys. Ring off."

The captain straightened his back; though one would have to stand behind him to know it.

"Dugan," he said severely, "I guess yuh're fgettin' who I am; and," he added, "why youse are. Th' trouble wit' me is that I'm too blame' lenient wit' youse guys. I give yuh too many liberties an' yuh take advantage of 'em an' impose on me." He wagged a fat forefinger admonishingly. "Now, don' get gay wit' me," he said threateningly, "'r I'll bump yuh, an' I'll bump yuh good. See?"

The captain stiffened savagely.

"None o' yuh business," he returned explosively. "Go an' do what I tell yuh 'r yuh'll get it an' yuh'll get it good. Now, beat it."

Detective Dugan opened his mouth. Then he closed it again. Then he turned on his heel and left the room.

Captain Sheehan picked up the little volume. And, as he flipped the shining edges of the leaves with a fat, blunt thumb, he muttered thoughtfully: "That guy won't never be no good to th' force. He ain't enterprisin' enough. I guess I better prefer charges an' dump him."

His eye chanced to fall on an illustration, thereby switching his train of thought to another track.

"Them old-time guys was a lot o' dubs," he



IN THE PARLOR OF WOLF TONE BRADY'S

"But my dooties!" protested Dugan. "I—"

The captain gazed at him with an air of outraged hauteur.

### III

"Don't talk tuh me about dooties," he cried sternly. "Your dooties is tuh do what I tell yuh tuh do an' tuh do it quick. See? How d' yuh s'pose I got this job, anyhow?"

Dugan ran a lumpy hand through a tangled red thatch.

"Pull," he returned curtly.

The captain eyed him sagely.

"If youse di'n' have th' woist-lookin' map of any guy on th' whole force," he snorted, "I'd break youse. I been goin' tuh give yuh a bump fr a long time now. Yuh been neglectin' yuh woids. Yuh don' get half as much out o' yuh distric' as youse oughter. Yuh're lazy, I'm thinkin'."

Dugan, impassive, gazed out upon the panorama of gravel roofs and iron chimneys.

The captain eyed him thoughtfully. "Bensonhoist 'r th' Loop fr his," he muttered, under his breath. But what he said to Dugan was merely, "We're gettin' off th' beat." And then, "I want youse tuh go down tuh Miss Angelina Brady's this evenin'.

When yuh goes in, take off your lid. Say Captain Miles Sheehan tenders his compliments tuh Miss Angelina Brady an' desires tuh offer her his heart an' han' in th' holy bonds o' matrimony frever an' frever till death doth them part. 'Frame it up tuh her nice, in them same woids, if yuh can remember 'em. 'N' then come 'round tuh my house an' tell me what she says."

Detective Dugan caressed thoughtfully a rough and motley check.

"Why don' yuh go yuhself?" he demanded. "Are yuh 'fraid?"

opened ruminatively. "Now I'll show this Standish bloke how tuh play th' game right." And he glued his gaze upon a picture of a "svelte" John Alden bending over a pulchritudinous Priscilla and tried to make himself believe that that was the way that he and Angelina would soon look in the parlor of Wolf Tone Brady's East Nineteenth Street flat.

That evening Captain Miles Sheehan sat within his ornate abode, fatly ensconced in a Mission rocker, with his feet on a Louis Quinze sofa, nervously flipping the ashes of his cigar upon a Smyrna rug, since each successive flip missed by a careless interval the Japanese vase at which it was aimed.

"I s'pose that sore-headed guy 'll come back here wit' a grouch on," he muttered, "an' tell me that he couldn't do not'n 'r wit' Angelina, thinkin' that 'll be th' easiest way out of it. But if he does I'll bounce him off'n th' force so quick he'll never know he was on it. He's no good anyhow, an' never was. W'y, he won't even come up tuh help us pass th' legislation we needs, an' on 'lection days we can't never count on him fr not'n." He—

There was a ring on the bell; and almost immediately his housekeeper entered.

"There's a guy at th' door wants tuh see yuh, sir," she announced shortly.

"What's his name?" demanded the captain.

"Detective Dugan—the homely guy it is, an' he—"

"Chase him in," commanded the captain quickly.

"An' get a wiggle on."

The housekeeper peevishly vanished, and Detective Dugan entered.

"Well?" cried the captain anxiously and fearfully.

Dugan gazed about the room cursorily and critically. He was apparently in no hurry.

"Well," said the captain again, "what's doin'?"

Dugan puffed on his cigar.

"It's hard tuh tell, jes' yet," he returned. "But

I think, if yuh play your game right, yuh got a show."

"Whajer mean?" demanded the captain. "Jer see her? Wha'd she say?"

The other picked up a piece of antique Egyptian pottery that had found being in Jersey City the year previous and examined the bottom of it closely.

"She says, 'What! That 'ol guy? Well, I should say not!'" returned Dugan. And then, as he gazed at the captain's empurpling visage, he added hastily, "That's what she said first. But I kep' at her, an' finally, before I come away, she wa'n't so sore on th' deal as she was in th' beginnin'." Yuh see, I tells her how much money youse has got an' I was also very partic'lar not tuh tell her how yuh gets it. An' I tells her, too, that looks don't make no dif'rence, an' so even if youse was a feeble o' guy wit' one foot in th' grave an' th' other in jail, as long as yuh'd loosen up onct in a while she oughter be able to stan' it. An' so I think that if we goes at it right, we c'n nail her yet."

The captain gripped his cigar with clenching jaw, the victim of mingled emotions; for he wasn't quite clear in his own mind whether he should feel outraged by the insults or elated at the encouragement that he had received.

He compromised. "Don't get gay 'r I'll han' yuh one," he threatened. And then, "Whajer mean by 'goes at it right?'"

"Why," returned Dugan imperturbably, "every guy what wants tuh win a dame always put up liberal—just like a cand'ate at 'lection time. After th' cand'ate gets elected, an' after th' guy gets married, they c'n both do as they pleases, yuh see! But before, they got tuh make a front. See?"

The captain nodded. Here, at last, was something well within his grasp.

"Well," continued Dugan, "y' oughter sen' her 'roun' some—eh—some flowers 'r somethin' like that. A box o' candy is considered a 'good come-on, too."

"How'd a case o' wine go?" queried the captain, more amenably; for his softer nature was beginning, under this encouragement, to dominate his ardor.

"Nix on th' bubbles," returned the other tersely. "Flowers an' candy is your bait; an' mebbe a spring lid, 'r a jool 'r two—somethin' neat but not noisy—like a di'mon' horseshoe, 'r a couple o' poil rings 'r some little thing like them."

"Juh think that'll help me make good?" asked the captain, anxiously. "Think I got a chanacet?"

"Sure," returned Dugan. "Sure yuh got a chanacet."

"But how'd she seem tuh take it?"

"Why, she sets there as quiet as yuh please an' listen tuh everything I says; an' then, when I leaves, she shakes hands wit' me an' asks me tuh come 'round again, an' makes her ol' man ask me, too, an' says fr me tuh tel' youse she'll t'ink it over an' le' me know how she feels nex' time I come 'round."

"Well, yuh go 'round tuh-morrer night. See?" ordered the captain.

Dugan shook his head.

"I can't go 'roun' wit'out takin' not'n," he replied. "I'd be 'shamed tuh have her t'ink I was doin' a Cupid fr such a cheap skate as that. Honest I would. An' besides, yuh'll crab th' whole deal 'f yuh don' loosen up. Yuh gotter go intuh th' dough bag fr love jes' like yuh has fr politics. . . . Love," he added philosophically, "is th' only graft goils has."

The captain dug down into his pocket. "How much?" he asked curtly, and as one to whom the words were most familiar.

Dugan considered thoughtfully. "Oh," he replied at length, "I guess about fifty 'll get us goin'."

The captain silently tendered him two twenties and a ten.

"I shall eggsp'c' yuh tuh-morrer night," he said. "An' remember if yuh don' pull this thing off fr me, yuh lose yuh job." And, as Dugan closed the front door behind him, he added, "Which ain't sayin' that yuh don't anyhow."

### IV

On the following night the John Alden of the East Side again appeared to make his report to the captain.

"Well, I give her th' flowers an' th' candy an' a fish-skin poil as big as a door-knob, an' I think we're doin' fine," he encouraged. "She was as pleased as a kitten wit' a saucer o' milk. Still, we can't afford tuh lay down none, 'cause if we does, some other guy may get in ahead of us. We gotter play tuh th' limit 'n' we can't be pikers. If th' goils' woid havin', she's woid goin' fr strong."

The captain nodded a reluctant assent to the other's cogent and concise logic.

"Jask her if she'd made up her mind tuh—tuh—tuh have me?" he inquired bashfully.

Dugan nodded.

"Wha'd she say?" queried the captain.

"She said they was eighteen 'r twenty applications in ahead o' yours," returned the envoy plenipotentiary, "but that, as you seemed to be such a generous guy, she felt sort o' like shovin' yours up th' list. That's your play," he counseled sagely, "that's your play—th' generous lay. It's th' only thing you got

in your favor against all them other guys. Yuh was tuh woid it fr all it's worth."

### V

The courtship of Miles Sheehan was a protracted affair.

The fair Angelina proved perverse and hard to woo; and, be it added, much harder to win. The other suitors, too, were, as the envoy's successive reports unfolded, most important and most liberal; and competition waxed ever keener.

A pearl necklace and a diamond tiara were added to the captain's gifts, to be succeeded by other (and most expensive) jewelry; while the cost of theatres, to which the fair one was always escorted by the prototype of the ancient John, and of candy and flowers grew ever heavier and heavier.

And Captain Sheehan spent hours thumbing over the little gilt-edged volume and wondering why it had not before occurred to him to follow up the line of thought as to what would have happened if the Priscilla therein mentioned had not been willing instantly to accept the other Miles or the other John.

At length, one evening, on the second day of the seventh week, he resolved to screw his courage to the sticking point and interview his Heart's Desire for himself.

It required no little effort, and no less determination, for the captain to get his courage to that point and to make it stick. However, he at length succeeded, and, lest his courage should become unloosened and slip far down and make the visit impossible of fulfillment, he quickly wiggled into his tan driving-coat, donned his silk hat and, hailing a cab, was wafted away toward where lay Wolf Tone Brady's East Nineteenth Street flat.

It was a glorious evening of early September. The sun, which had dropped behind the dirty, serrated roofs of the Western sky-line, peeped at him coquetishly adown the darkening depths of the cross streets.

With a rush and a rattle and a roar an elevated train passed above him; the clanging gongs of the trolleys made music beside him; and with them rose the mutter of many voices and the calls of playing children and the harsh, tinny music of hurdy-gurdies.

But these things had no interest for Captain Sheehan, whose thoughts were with his Heart's Desire and the last and most royal gift that he had given her—a French touring car of the latest model.

The cab in which he speciously reclined rattled swiftly onward. All of a sudden, as it neared a side street, there came the frantic honking of an automobile horn and with it the excited, warning cries of passers-by; and, in another half-instant, a big red automobile had struck the captain's equipage, with a harsh, tearing impact, two points off the port bow.

The driver of the cab was spread flatly out upon the top of his vehicle. The horse suddenly and surprisingly sat down between the car tracks. Then the captain's huge bulk rose in a beautiful parabola and, soaring gracefully over the dashboard of the cab, alighted in a jump in the tonneau of the car which, from a momentary pause, now sped onward faster and ever faster, up the crowded thoroughfare, in human eagerness to get away from the excited threats and angry yells of an excited populace.

They had gone fifty blocks ere the captain could find foothold upon the rocking floor. But at length he did; and, clinging with frightened hands to the robe-rail, he leaned forward to get a look at his captor.

And his eyes bulged in fat surprise; for the man who was guiding the great car along the jumbled, pillar-studded thoroughfare was none other than his love-courier, Dugan!

For a space he was able to do nothing but gasp, for the shock and surprise had quite overwhelmed him; and ere his tongue found ought upon it to say, they had turned down a side street and had stopped before his own door.

It was then that an asthmatic gasp brought him to the attention of the chauffeur; and Dugan took his hand from the emergency to find himself staring into the empurpled visage of Captain Sheehan.

"Well, I'll be dam'd!" he exclaimed; and there could be not the slightest doubt but that he meant it. The captain wheezed with congested conversation.

"Well," cried Dugan at length, "where you come from?"

"I was in th' cab," returned the captain; and his vocabulary suddenly returned to him in a verbal cloudburst.

But Dugan, with an insouciant but authoritative wave of the hand, interrupted him in the middle of his pet phrase; at which, such was the captain's surprise, that he stopped so suddenly that he almost swallowed the last two syllables of the biggest word he knew.

"Very pretty talk," said Dugan critically. "But I ain't got no time tuh listen now, fr I've went intuh th' reel estate bus'ness wit' th' money yuh give me, an' a check 'll be comin' tuh yuh to-morrer. But I got tuh go take some customers out in th' ottomobeel tuh look at a piece o' prop'ty in th' Bronx. However, before offishully leavin' th' force, I was feelin' that I oughter come around an' tell yuh that Angelina Brady's been married fr seven years tuh a guy who's a drummer fr a wholesale glue house an' who don't get home but onct a month; so I di'n' waste none o' my time nor none o' your money there; an' I'd advise you not tuh, neither. So long."

Whereat Dugan threw off the emergency and threw in the clutch and vanished in a cloud of dust.

The housekeeper, coming into the captain's study late that night, in pursuance of her window-locking obligations, found him sitting with three-quarters of an unlighted cigar in his mouth, while, scattered all about him on the floor were the torn and tattered remains of a little gilt-edged volume, the mutilated title-page of which bore, in trampled gold letters, "The Courtship of Miles Standish."